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PAPERS READ
BEFORE THE
ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY.

I.—*A Visit to the River Zambezi.* By T. S. LEIGH, Esq.

[Read February 28, 1848.]

ANIMATED by a love of adventure and a desire to explore regions little known, I availed myself a few years since of an opportunity of proceeding to the eastern coast of Africa, so seldom visited by Europeans, and had already been for some time engaged in examining several of its most interesting points, when circumstances led to my finding myself, in the middle of the month of July, 1839, at the principal of the numerous mouths of the river Zambezi. We had made the land in its vicinity three days before; but owing to the excessive cloudiness of the weather, which prevented any observation being taken, and the total absence of landmarks to indicate its position, our worthy skipper had failed discovering it. The whole line of coast for a degree or two to the northward and southward is moreover invisible at a greater distance than a few miles. In approaching land of this description, particularly within the tropics, the view to the beholder is most singular: the clumps of tall palm-trees, rising at first like so many islands with their bases enveloped in mist from the bosom of the ocean, and apparently unconnected with any support; but as the distance decreases, the dim misty outline gradually disappearing, their nature becomes more fully defined, and they are then seen to rest on a stronger foundation than that before afforded to the deceived eye.

With great care in sounding, we passed safely over the dangerous bar, on which at low water nothing is seen but huge breakers. The shoals forming it shift a good deal—so much so, indeed, that the soundings laid down in Captain Owen's chart some twenty years ago are not to be depended upon. We anchored just inside Tangalane Point, where a fire is always kept burning at night, close to the flag-staff, as a signal to vessels in the offing. This had, however, escaped our observation, the strong northerly current having set us past it before dark.

Hippopotamus Point, on the southern shore, seems not unaptly so named, the first creature we descried on the beach being a huge animal of that species, which, scared at the near approach of so much larger an object than itself, scuttled down to the water with all possible speed, and shortly afterwards raised its head above the surface at some distance, opening its enormous jaws, and uttering the indescribable harsh bellowing cry peculiar to this river monster.

On the following day a black pilot—who, however, called himself a Portuguese—came to take the vessel up to the town of Quilimane, about ten miles distant; and truly interesting was this sail from the great variety of animal life to be seen on the banks. The river varies in width from one to three miles; but as our course lay chiefly along the northern shore in order to avoid the numerous shoals, our proximity enabled us to see distinctly everything passing. Numbers of hippopotami were rolling their unwieldy carcasses in the deep bed of mud left outside the fringe of gloomy mangroves which mostly line the banks, but they retreated to their oozy abodes at our approach. Where a break occurred in the mangroves, and trees of greater height appeared, intermixed with tangled brushwood, many varieties of the monkey-tribe were to be seen springing from branch to branch, or swinging by their tails from the huge creepers, forming more or less graceful festoons.

On some of the extensive sandbanks large flocks of flamingoes stalked along in Indian file, requiring a close inspection to satisfy us that they were not really, as they appeared at a distance, scarlet coated warriors—pelicans, solitary or in pairs, were sailing undisturbed in the shallows—and on the verge of the water numerous kinds of cranes, curlews, gulls, and other aquatic birds, were busily engaged in fishing or extracting worms and insects from the mud. Of alligators we saw none; they are found generally higher up the river, beyond the tide.

We touched gently on the mud several times, for it is only at spring-tides that large vessels can cross the smaller bar (a shoal about half-way up), and approaching an apology for a battery, armed with two guns of small calibre, we were hailed in most unintelligible jargon. This being responded to on our part in a similar style, perfectly satisfactory, however, to the garrison, we proceeded to drop our anchor opposite to the spot on which the straggling town above-mentioned is situated, in the midst of no less than thirteen slave-brigs, brigantines, and schooners—all Brazilians, with one exception (a Spaniard), and all under Portuguese colours.

Although called a town, Quilimane bears but small resemblance to such: there are no streets laid out at right angles, no

squares, and no public buildings, with the exception of a small church under the patronage of Nossa Senhora do Livramento; and a number of sheds included in one long quadrangle, and dignified by the titles of custom-house, barracks, prison, &c.

Notwithstanding the numerous vessels by which this place is visited there is no mole or wharf of any description whereon to land; and as the receding tide leaves bare a deep bed of mud, disembarkation is sometimes rather hazardous. I was, however, fortunately provided with an excellent substitute for a landing-plank in the shape of a gigantic attendant, who bore me to the shore on his broad shoulders in safety.

We were received with great politeness by the Governor, Lieutenant-Colonel Don Thomas José Peres, a man of very gentlemanly bearing, who entertained us with a long account of a war in which he had lately been engaged with a powerful negro tribe from the southward. These savages—whom I presume to be the same mentioned in Captains Owen and Boteler's works as the Oratontahs or Vatwahs, and of whom they have given such interesting accounts—advanced to within a week's journey of Quilimane, after committing great devastations, but were at length driven back by the militia, composed partly of free blacks, partly of the slaves belonging to the different estates, headed by their owners. Previously to their first attack, which was made on the distant settlement of Manica, the Vatwahs, according to their invariable custom, sent an arrow to the Governor as an intimation of their intention to commence hostilities, but before measures could be taken to put a stop to their progress, that town had been taken by assault and every living creature massacred.

Various accounts were given me of the population of Quilimane; but the Governor's estimate was, I should think, the most correct: he considered it to be about 15,000; this, however, included the country for some miles around. Of these 10 only were genuine Portuguese. 20 were Creoles, 12 Canareens or merchants from Goa, free blacks from 2000 to 3000, and the remainder domestic and agricultural slaves. There were besides a few Banyans or Indian merchants and Parsees; but owing to some alleged injury they were said to occasion to commerce by their mode of traffic (their superior industry and talents for business enabling them to outdo their competitors), a peremptory order had been issued for their departure from all the Portuguese possessions in Africa, and the vessels employed in trading between these and India were being loaded with their goods to convey them to the latter country. Of course they complained bitterly of the decree as most arbitrary. At Senna and Tété the number of Portuguese is more consi-

derable. They are chiefly persons transported from the mother-country for political or other offences, or men of low origin landed from some of the slaving craft, and who have amassed wealth by various means, often not the most honest; consequently the society is not particularly select. The Canareens decidedly form the most respectable portion of the community. None of the settlers, however, appear by any means to be deficient in hospitality; and the reception I met with from one of the richest of the Portuguese inhabitants was most friendly. He allotted me an excellent apartment in his spacious dwelling, and every possible means were adopted to render my stay agreeable.

My entertainer's (Don Pedro's) establishment presented a good specimen of the style in which the settlers live, his board being amply provided with flesh and fowl, wild and tame, and with all procurable luxuries both at breakfast and dinner, the only two repasts of which they partake; the sole refreshment after the latter meal, which is over early (generally about four o'clock), being green tea, in small cups and without milk, brought shortly after the host leaves the dinner-table, either into the broad piazzas in the interior of the dwelling, or into the portico without. In the former case, whilst indolently reclining on a sofa and smoking a "cigarrito," he has a view of his slave-yard, round three sides of which are sheds for the accommodation of men, women, and children, of all ages, whilst in the middle is to be seen an ominous-looking post, at the foot of which all infractors of the domestic regulations meet with summary chastisement.

Each establishment has a number of domestic slaves attached to it, proportionate to the circumstances of the owner, and dressed, after their fashion, in his livery; that is, with a piece of cloth fastened round the loins and descending to the knees, each house having its own pattern. Many of them are to be seen lounging about at all hours of the day, with their arms crossed, or lying in groups near their masters' doors, apparently without an earthly care, their sole occupation being to convey some of the family from one house to the other, part of the number carrying the machila or hammock, and the remainder running behind.

The free blacks in the vicinity of the town, who belong principally to the Macúa tribe, are a merry set of beings. Although burthened in different ways by the government, being obliged to contribute their labour to the crown-lands, and pay heavy tribute in kind to the chief of their district, they appear utterly devoid of care, working away cheerfully in their paddy, maize, or natchini-fields during the day, and

at night are to be seen in every direction, dancing to the sound of the tom-tom, in which amusement the slaves likewise join.

The same spirit of cheerfulness before described extends even to the slaves already embarked for exportation ; so many of them are allowed on the deck of each vessel as it will hold, and there they strike their tom-toms and sing in chorus, clapping their hands as an accompaniment, apparently with as much animation as if they were still in their native villages. Of course it is a great object with the masters of the slavers to keep up this spirit of contentment as much as possible, and as the unfortunate beings, about to be severed from their kindred soil, are in a state of the most complete ignorance as to what is in store for them on arrival at their place of destination, this cheerfulness is in reality not so extraordinary. Some of those, however, belonging to tribes living at a great distance inland, are said to believe that they are to be eaten.

Most of the slaves exported are brought down from the interior in long lines of both sexes and all ages (mostly, however, from 12 to 25), chained to each other by the neck, and are sold at the port for a sum varying from 10 to 40 Spanish dollars each. They are procured in exchange for dungaree, muskets, powder, gaudy cotton handkerchiefs, and prints, beads, and a few other articles imported by the slavers, who, however, in order to make up their cargoes quickly, likewise bring large quantities of Spanish dollars, doubloons, and moidores. Each master or supercargo of one of these vessels on arrival hires a store with a number of attendant blacks, and gradually disposes of his stock of goods, generally paying the settlers half in merchandise and half in cash for the slaves he purchases. Besides the traffic in slaves, carried on with the interior by means of black dealers principally, the Portuguese have another and more nefarious mode of obtaining them ; they arm their domestics in considerable numbers, and make incursions into the territories of the distant tribes, and capture all they can without distinction, no native army being able to resist the fire-arms of the Europeans.

Although the Governors of the Portuguese colonies in Africa have at different times of late years received instructions from their government to issue peremptory orders, prohibiting the exportation of slaves, and several have professed endeavouring to carry these orders into execution, they have either given it up as a hopeless task, or found it to their advantage to connive at the practice ; indeed, fear of the consequences, if nothing else, would deter those most alive to a sense

of duty from discouraging the slave-trade, having before their eyes the example of several of their predecessors, who being most persevering in their endeavours to effect other improvements, fell victims to assassination. The settlers have therefore hitherto managed to elude all attempts, either internal or external, to put a stop to the traffic, and it appears to be still carried on from the eastern coast with great vigour, notwithstanding the abolition of a privilege, under the cloak of which vessels bearing the Portuguese flag laughed at our cruisers, that, namely, of conveying slaves from one of their possessions in Africa to another.

Much has been remarked on the unhealthiness of the western, and the comparative salubrity of the eastern coast, of Africa ; but if I may be allowed to express an opinion, I should say that in this respect they are very much on a par. The mortality at Quilimane at certain periods is frightful ; when vessels happen to remain during the rainy season, which commences in October and lasts, with short intervals, till February, their crews suffer dreadfully ; even in the dry season many are carried off, and it is not to be wondered at, for the whole country for at least twenty leagues in every direction is one vast alluvial flat, covered mostly with forest, and either marshy or intersected by numerous small rivers flowing slowly into the great stream, and these not limpid rivelets, but sluggish drains, half full of mud, the banks of which are thickly lined with the deadly mangrove. Neither horses nor cattle thrive ; when imported they live but for a short time, unless sent up to the higher grounds of Senna or Tété.

Throughout the whole of the country subject to the Portuguese, the sportsman may gratify his passion to its utmost extent. Wild beasts abound even in the neighbourhood of Quilimane, and the elephant at times makes his appearance close to the town. The hippopotamus affords likewise ample field for sport ; and although, apparently, an unwieldy animal, when provoked becomes active enough, and woe to the unlucky wight who then happens to come in contact with his enormous strength.

The negroes up the stream kill this animal in the following manner : watching the place where one has sunk, and is likely to rise again, they paddle gently up to it as he makes his appearance, and drive a harpoon into his fat carcass above the spine ; to this a bladder is attached by a long line, and as the blow is generally given with great precision, the effect is instantaneous : the animal sinks and is gradually carried down by the current, the bladder always indicating the spot where he is ; four and twenty hours after death the body floats, when

it is drawn to the shore and the flesh greedily devoured by the natives.

The banks of the Zambezi * near Senna are extensively inundated in the rainy season, and then crowds of wild animals of every description are driven to take refuge on the higher grounds, which stand out like so many islands in the midst of an inland sea; here the natives assail them, and commit great havoc amongst the defenceless herds: even the ferocious beasts of the forest submit then to be slaughtered unresistingly by the spears and arrows of their foes.

It is by no means an unfrequent occurrence for a tiger, or rather panther, to pay a visit to the town in the night.

II.—*Mayotta and the Comoro Islands.* By T. S. LEIGH, Esq.

[Read June 21, 1848.]

WHILST passing through the Mosambique Channel a few years since an opportunity occurred of visiting this cluster of islands, situated near the northern entrance of that channel, between Cape Ambre, the extremity of Madagascar, on one side, and Cape Delgado, the E. coast of Africa, on the other. It is almost superfluous to state that this group consists of four islands: Comoro, which gives its name to the group, but is called by the natives Angazija; Johanna or Nzuaana, already sufficiently described by various travellers; Mohilla; and last, but not least, Mayotta, one but little, if at all, frequented by navigators, but to which public attention has been lately in some measure directed by the proposed colonization of it by the French.

The dangerous reefs, that stretch a distance of several miles from the shores of Mayotta, as well as the supposed difficulty of procuring provisions, have doubtless contributed at all times to deter vessels from touching there, the more so as they have the certainty of obtaining a good supply and a hospitable reception at Johanna, where, moreover, there is a safe roadstead. Undeterred, however, by the risks to be encountered, we stretched across from the latter island, having on board Shea Abdallah, an uncle, and at one time prime minister, of its most potent monarch. According to this man's account, the royal family of Johanna is descended from one of three Persian princes, who some centuries since were driven from their country either during one of the revolutions then so common,

* Vide Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, vol. ii. p. 136, vol. iii. p. 199, vol. v. p. 340, vol. xv. p. 185, vol. xvi. p. 139.—Ed.